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NSC BRIEFING

CONFIDENTIAL

5 August 1959

LAOS

- I. Government's military position in northern Laos remains weak.
(Optimistic communiques issued in past two days to reassure public.)
- A. Communist partisan elements estimated at about 1,500 have occupied several army outposts in Sam Neua and Phong Saly Provinces and are threatening several others.
- B. Government forces in these provinces number 2,700. They are widely scattered; reinforcements and air lift capability limited.
- C. Government has declared martial law in these two provinces and in three others in central Laos where scattered harassing incidents have occurred.
1. Insurgent forces largely composed tribesmen who inhibit both sides frontier making identification of nationality difficult and providing Hanoi with ready assets to train, equip and deploy.

25X1 II. [REDACTED] several hundred regular Chicom forces have replaced Chicom security detachments along the Chinese border.

A. This may be a pressure tactic to intimidate Laos.

III. No doubt that present fighting in Laos inspired by Communist powers; probably coordinated by Hanoi and Peiping with concurrency by Moscow. (Ho Chi Minh now enroute back from USSR where he has been since early July.)

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- A. No firm evidence of direct North Vietnamese intervention, although Laotian Commie forces at least cadred and supplied by Hanoi.
- B. Given inadequacy of Lao army, seems unnecessary for either North Vietnam or Communist China to intervene with regular units.
- IV. Bloc motivated by fact Laos been increasingly pro-Western with accompanying repression of Communist activity.
 - A. Action also coincides with recent French-US decision to train Laotian army jointly.
- V. Hanoi, Peiping and Moscow continue shrill calls for reconvening International Control Commission for Laos.
 - A. They want this group protection for local Communist movement.
 - B. Brunt of bloc propaganda campaign borne by Hanoi which categorically denies involvement in fighting and accuses Lao government of instigating civil war and allowing country to become military pawn of US. Hanoi asserts military developments are "threat to security of North Vietnam," to which it cannot remain indifferent.
 - C. Chinese Communists have largely repeated Hanoi's propaganda verbatim.
 - D. Soviet propaganda charges American policy to blame for the "threat to peace" in Indochina by converting Laos into a US military base within "zone of action of SEATO." Soviet broadcast of 2 August declared that situation is extremely dangerous.

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- VI. Laos has notified UN Sec Gen Hammarskjold of "dangerous situation" and may follow through with request for observers or other action.
- A. Hammarskjold reportedly unwilling intercede on own initiative even if requested by Laos.
- VII. Laos adamantly opposed return of ICC.
- A. Britain, as co-chairman with USSR of 1954 Geneva Indochina settlement under increasingly heavy pressure from Moscow to reconvene ICC.
1. Sec Lloyd has urged door not be shut on possible return of ICC since Indian and Canadian members "might be able to play a constructive role."
- B. Nehru has taken a "grave" view of the fighting and is consulting with both London and Moscow.
1. He probably is stepping up his pressure on British to reconvene ICC, arguing that recent outbreak confirms his previous fears and makes presence of ICC essential to control dangerous situation.

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